

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /083 W
-----063853 030438Z /15

R 021235Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1983
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 NEW DELHI 8656

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN POLITICS: A PRE-VISIT UPDATE

REFS: A. NEW DELHI 8047 B. NEW DELHI 7537
C. NEW DELHI A-129

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: EVEN THOUGH PARLIAMENT
HAS ADJOURNED, MOST MP'S ARE OUT OF THE CAPITAL AND
MANY GOI MINISTERS ARE AWAY ON FOREIGN TOURS, THE
POLITICAL POT CONTINUES TO BOIL IN NORTH INDIA'S IN-
TENSE SUMMER HEAT. MAY AND JUNE ARE TRADITIONALLY
MONTHS OF POLITICAL DOLDRUMS; THIS YEAR IS AN EXCEPTION.

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HOSPITALIZED GOI HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH IS THE
IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF JANATA'S CURRENT TROUBLES, AND THE
CHRONIC POLITICAL TURMOIL OF THE NORTHERN JANATA-
RULED STATES IS THE FOCUS AROUND WHICH THESE TROUBLES
REVOLVE. DESPITE HIS HOSPITALIZATION (OR PERHAPS BECAUSE
OF IT), CHARAN SINGH HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN DEFENDING HIS
POSITION AGAINST WHAT HE SEES AS ATTEMPTS TO DENIGRATE

HIM. HIS TOUGH, OUTSPOKEN TACTICS STEM FROM HIS CONVICTION THAT HE IS AND MUST CONTINUE TO BE REGARDED AS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN NATIONAL POLITICS. YET, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT CHARAN SINGH WILL MAKE AN OUTRIGHT BID TO REPLACE MORARJI DESAI AS PRIME MINISTER. JANATA'S FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS ARE AS FAR FROM RESOLUTION AS EVER, AND PRIME MINISTER DESAI SEEMS UNPERTURBED AND UNRUFLED BY WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND HIM, REPEATING HIS FAMILIAR PRESCRIPTION THAT " ALL WILL BE WELL WITHIN SIX MONTHS" THE DESAI GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE UNDECIDED WHAT TO DO WITH THE SHAH COMMISSION'S INDICTMENT OF MRS. GANDHI FOR HER EMERGENCY MISDEEDS AND EXCESSES. AS FOR THE OPPOSITION, CONFUSION PREVAILS IN THE OFFICIAL CONGRESS PARTY OVER WHERE IT GOES NEXT. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

2. HOSPITALIZED GOI HOME MINISTER CHARA SINGH CONTINUES TO BE THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF THE CURRENT TROUBLES AFFLICTING THE JANATA PARTY, AND THE CHRONIC POLITICAL TURMOIL IN MANY OF THE NORTHERN JANATA-RULED STATES HAS BEEN THE FOCUS AROUND WHICH THESE TROUBLES REVOLVE. THE CHIEF MINISTERS OF HARYANA, UP AND BIHAR -- ALL FORMERLY FROM CHARAN SINGH'S BLD AND REGARDED AS PROTEGES OF THE HOME MINISTER -- HAVE BEEN UNDER FIRE FROM DISSIDENTS AMONG THEIR OWN LIGISLATORS. ALTHOUGH DEVI LAL ULTIMATELY WON A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE TO REMAIN AS CHIEF MINISTER OF HARYANA, MLA'S IN UP HAVE STEPPED UP THEIR DEMANDS THAT CHIEF MINISTER RAM NARESH
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YADAV RESIGN ON THE GROUNDS OF HIS IMCOMPETENCE TO RUN INDIA'S LARGEST STATE. WHEN THE JANATA LEADERSHIP -- WITHOUT CONSULTING CHARAN SINGH -- DECIDED TO RESOLVE THE UP TANGLE BY DIRECTING YADAV TO SEEK A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE AMONG HIS MLA'S ON JUNE 4, THE HOME MINISTER ANGRILY DENOUNCED THE DECISION AS BIASED AND UNWARRANTED. HE SUBSEQUENTLY WENT ON THE COUNTER-ATTACK BY DEMANDING THAT BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER KARPOORI THAKUR SHOULD ALSO SEEK A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE AMONG HIS MLA'S. CHARAN SINGH'S DEMAND WAS CLEARLY DESIGNED AS A PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE DESIGNED TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE AWAY FROM HIS DETRACTORS IN THE PARTY AND ALSO TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HIS BASE OF SUPPORT IN THE NORTHERN "HINDI BELT" REMAINS UNSHAKEN.

3. AT PRESENT, IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT YADAV AND THAKUR WILL SURVIVE THESE VOTES OF CONFIDENCE. THE ATTITUDE OF THE DISCIPLINED AND COHESIVE JANA SANGH BLOC OF MLA'S IS THE CRUCIAL FACTOR, AND THE SANGH LEADERSHIP HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT OPPOSES ABRUPT CHANGES OF LEADERSHIP IN THE JANATA-RULED STATES. THUS, WITH JANA SANGH SUPPORT ASSURED FOR HIS PROTEGES IN UP AND BIHAR, CHARAN SINGH WILL HAVE WITHSTOOD WHAT HE PERCEIVED AS CHALLENGES TO

HIS AUTHORITY IN THE NORTH. YET, THESE CHALLENGES DO NOT APPEAR TO ORIGINATE FROM ANY PARTICULAR ELEMENT OF THE JANATA LEADERSHIP AT THE CENTER. SOME OF CHARAN SINGH'S CRITICS AS THE NATIONAL LEVEL MAY BE OFFERING ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE DISSIDENTS IN THE STATES, BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THEY ARE ACTUALLY SPONSORING THE MOVEMENTS AGAINST THE CHIEF MINISTERS. INDEED, EVEN THE SOCIALISTS, WHO IN THE PAST WERE AT ODDS WITH THE HOME MINISTER, NOW SEEM PREPARED TO SUPPORT HIS CHIEF MINISTERS. IN ADDITION, CHARAN SINGH'S SUCCESS IN MAINTAINING THE CHIEF MINISTERS WILL NOT BE VIEWED AS A SETBACK FOR THE PRIME MINISTER, SINCE MORARJI HAS CONSISTENTLY STAYED ABOVE THE FRAY.

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INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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ICA-11 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /083 W
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R 021235Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1984
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR TEXT (PARA 4 IMI 4)

4. DESPITE HIS HOSPITALIZATION (OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF IT), CHARAN SINGH HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN DEFENDING HIS POSITION AGAINST WHAT HE SEES AS ATTEMPTS TO DENIGRATE HIM. RECENTLY, HE ISSUED A TOUGH STATEMENT ALLEGING THAT THE SOLE REASON FOR THE JANATA'S POOR PERFORMANCE WAS THAT THE ARTY HAD BEEN CAPTURED "BY THOSE PERSONS WHO HAD BEEN PROPONENTS

OF HEAVY INDUSTRY." IT IS COMMON PRACTICE FOR INDIAN POLITICANS TO PORTRAY THEIR PERSONAL QUARRLES IN IDEOLOGICAL TERMS, AND CHARAN SINGH'S PENCHANT FOR TOUGH TALKING IS WELL KNOWN. NONETHELESS, IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS LATEST BLAST WAS AIMED AT THOSE EX-CONGRESSMEN IN THE JANATA WHO DO NOT WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORT CHARAN SINGH'S PHILOSOPHY OF EMPYASIZING RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND

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SMALL-SCALE INDUSTRY. WHILE THE PRIME MINISTER SHRUGS OFF THESE OUTBURSTS, DEFENSE MINISTER JAGJIVAN RAM, PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHRA AND OTHERS TAKE A MUCH DIMMER VIEW OF CHARAN SINGH'S MOVES. RAM, FOR INSTANCE, IS REPORTED TO HAVE TOLD COLLEAGUES RECENTLY THAT HE MADE A MISTAKIN IN MERGING HIS CFD INTO THE JANATA LAST YEAR AND IN JOINING THE DESAI GOVERNMENT.

5. CHARAN SINGH'S TOUGH TACTICS STEM FROM HIS CONVICTION THAT HE IS AND MUST CONTINUE TO BE REGARDED AS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN NATIONAL POLITICS. HE EVIDENTLY FEARED THAT HIS OPPONENTS IN THE PARTY WERE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HIS HOSPITALIZATION TO TRY TO ERODE HIS POSITION. HIS PERIODIC OUTBURSTS SEEM DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE CANNOT BE PUSHED AROUND AND ARE TYPICAL OF HIS BLUNT, OUTSPOKEN STYLE OF FUNCTIONING. YET, AT PRESENT WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT HE WILL MAKE AN OUTRIGHT EFFORT TO REPLACE MORARJI AS PRIME MINISTER. HE MUST REALIZE THAT A 76-YEAR OLD VICITIM OF A SERIOUS HEART ATTACK WILL HARDLY BE ACCEPTED AS A CREDIBLE CANDIDATE. ALSO, WITH THE CRUCIAL JANA SANGH BLOC SOLIDLY LINED UP BEHING MORARJI, HE MUST REALIZE THAT HE DOES NOT CONTROL SUFFICIENT BACKING AMONG THE JANATA MP'S TO MAKE SUCH A BID. EVEN MANY OF HIS FORMER BLD COLLEAGUES, SUCH AS STELL MINISTER BIJU PATNAIK'S GROUP OF MP'S FROM ORISSA, NOW SEEM MORE COMMITTED TO MORARJI THAN TO CHARAN SINGH.

6. MANY OF THE KEY PLAYERS IN THIS POLITICKING CURRENTLY ARE OR ARE ABOUT TO LEAVE ON FOREIGN TRIPS. WITH THE ABSENCE OF DEFENSE MINISTER RAM AND THE IMPENDING DEPARTURE OF PM DESAI AND FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE FOR THE U.S., THE EFFORT BY A GROUP OF "YOUNGER" MINISTERS TO RECONCILE THE "BIG THREE" (ALSO KNOWN HERE AS THE

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"TRINITY") HAS LAPSED FOR THE MOMENT. IN ANY EVENT THIS ATTEMPT HAD NOT ACHIEVED MUCH PROGRESS IN ITS EARLY STAGES.

IN ADDITION, CHARAN SINGH'S STILL PENDING LETTER OF RESIGNATION FROM THE JANATA'S PARLIAMENTARY BOARD AND NATIONAL EXECUTIVE HAS BEEN QUIETLY SHELVED BY THE PARTY LEADERSHIP.

7. WHAT ALL OF THIS ADDS UP TO IS THAT JANATA'S FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS ARE AS FAR FROM RESOLUTION AS EVER, AND THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE RESORTING TO PATCH-WORK SCHEMES AS THEY "MUDDLE THROUGH" IN THE TIME-HONORED INDIAN FASHION. NO ONE HERE SERIOUSLY BELIEVES THAT THE JANATA FACES AN IMMINENT BREAK-UP, IF ONLY BECAUSE ENOUGH OF THE PARTNERS IN THE ENTERPRISE CANNOT BE CERTAIN THAT THE POTENTIAL GAINS FROM SUCH A MOVE WILL NOT BE OUTWEIGHED BY POTENTIAL LOSSES. FURTHER INTENSIFY OUTBURSTS FROM CHARAN SINGH AND HIS DEPUTY RAJ NARAIN CAN BE EXPECTED AS THE HOME MINISTER SEEKS TO PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION. FACTIONAL DISPUTES IN THE STATES ARE LIKELY TO RECUR EVEN ASSUMING THAT THE CHIEF MINISTERS WIN THEIR UPCOMING VOTES OF CONFIDENCE. AS THE EDITOR OF THE "INDIAN EXPRESS" RECENTLY PUT IT, "THE LITTLE CHARADE WILL HAVE ENDED UNTIL THE NEXT TRIAL OF STRENGTH COMES ALONG." MEANWHILE, STANDING REMOTE FROM THE DIN AND HEAT OF THE INTERMINABLE IN-FIGHTING, PRIME MINISTER DESAI REMAINS SEEMINGLY UNRUFFLED AND UNPERTURBED. HIS LATEST PRESCRIPTION FOR CURING THE PARTY'S MANY ILLS IS THAT THE ENDING OF THE MEMBERSHIP DRIVE AND HOLDING OF ORGANIZATIONAL ELECTIONS (NOW ONCE AGAIN RESCHEDULED TO JULY 31 AND OCTOBER 31 RESPECTIVELY) WILL SET THE JANATA'S HOUSE IN ORDER "WITHIN SIX MONTHS." IT IS A HOMILY WHICH MANY SCEPTICAL SPECTATORS OF THE INDIAN SCENE HAVE HEARD BEFORE.

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ACTION EUR-12

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ICA-11 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /083 W
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R 021235Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1985
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
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AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
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8. AT THE SAME TIME, THE JANATA GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE IN A QUANDRY AS TO WHAT TO DO ABOUT MRS. GANDHI. THERE IS INDECISION REGARDING FOLLOW-UP STEPS ON THE SHAH COMMISSION'S STRONG INDICTMENTS OF THE FORMER PM, HER SON AND ASSOCIATES AS CONTAINED IN THE TWO INTERIM REPORTS PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT ON MAY 15 (NEW DELHI 7699.) IN THE INTERVENING WEEKS, MRS. GANDHI HAS CHARACTERISTICALLY SOUGHT TO PORTRAY THE COMMISSION'S FINDINGS AS A POLITICAL VENDATTA DESIGNED TO SMEAR HER REPUTATION. THE GOVERNMENT FACES SEVERAL POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE ROUTES TO TRY TO PROSECUTE HER FOR HER MISDEEDS. ONE ROUTE IS TO INSTITUTE A SERIES OF CRIMINAL CASES AGAINST HER THROUGH THE EXISTING LAW COURTS ON SPECIFIC CHARGES OF ABUSE OF POWER REVEALED IN THE REPORTS. GIVEN THE INDIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEMS MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR DELAY AND APPEALS, HOW3
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EVER, SUCH A COURSE COULD DRAG ON FOR YEARS, DURING WHICH TIME MRS. GANDHI WOULD BE AT THE CENTER OF THE POLITICAL STAGE HOTLY DENOUNCING THE COURT PROCEEDINGS AND REAPING SUBSTANTIAL POLITICAL BENEFITS IN THE PROCESS. OTHER IDEAS ARE TO CONVERT THE LOK SABHA ITSELF INTO A TRIBUNAL COURT TO JUDGE THE FORMER PM OR TO ENACT A LAW WHICH WOULD PERMANENTLY DEBAR FROM ELECTIVE OFFICE THOSE PERSONS CHARGED BY AN INQUIRY COMMISSION WITH ABUSING POWER WHILE IN OFFICE. THE LATEST IDEA IS TO CREATE A SPECIAL SESSIONS COURT DIRECTLY UNDER SUPREME COURT AUSPICES SPECIFICALLY TO TRY MRS. GANDHI AND HER ASSOCIATES. THE HOME MINISTRY HAS VIGOROUSLY DENIED THESE PRESS REPORTS OF A SPECIAL COURT AND HAS NOTED ONLY THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS STILL CONSIDERING WHICH INVESTIGATIVE AGENCY SHOULD BE ENTRUSTED WITH DEVELOPING CRIMINAL CASES AGAINST THE FORMER PM. (OUR JOURNALIST SOURCES HERE DIFFER AS TO WHO INSPIRED THESE LATEST REPORTS AND WHETHER THERE IS SOME TRUTH TO THEM.

9. THE FINDINGS OF THE SHAH COMMISSION ARE A "WILD" CARD" IN INDIAN POLITICS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT MAY OR MAY NOT PLAY. NO ONE IS QUITE CERTAIN WHAT IMPACT IT WILL HAVE ON THE POLITICAL GAME. THE GOVERNMENT HAS

PLEDGED THAT THOSE CHARGED WITH EMERGENCY EXCESSES SHOULD BE "BROUGHT TO BOOK" FOR THEIR ACTIONS, AND A LEADER OF PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S MORAL RECTITUDE WOULD BE LOATH TO ALLOW THESE PERSONS TO GO UNSCATHED BY THE RULE OF LAW. YET, THERE IS THE REALIZATION THAT ANY JUDICIAL ACTION TAKEN AGAINST MRS. GANDHI WOULD FEED THE GRISTMILL OF HER CONSIDERABLE PROPAGANDA MACHINE AND COULD ALSO PROVOKE WIDESPREAD OUTBURSTS OF VIOLENCE FOMENTED BY HER LOYALISTS. (CONGRESS (I) FIGURES HAVE STATED THAT THEY WILL LAUNCH MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

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MOVEMENTS AROUND THE COUNTRY IF ANY ACTION IS TAKEN AGAINST THEIR PARTY PRESIDENT.) HENCE, "TIMES OF INDIA" EDITOR GIRILAL JAIN RECENTLY SUGGESTED THAT THE BEST COURSE MAY BE SIMPLY TO "LEAVE HER GET AWAY WITH WHAT AMOUNTED TO SUBVERSION OF THE CONSTITUTION", SINCE ADOPTION OF THE OTHER COURSE "CAN LAND THE COUNTRY IN SERIOUS TROUBLE". HOWEVER, TO DROP THE QUESTION OF MRS. GANDHI'S GUILT POSES ITS OWN DANGERS. NOT ONLY WOULD IT AROUSE STRONG PROTESTS FROM VISCERAL ANTI-INDIRISTS (PARTICULARLY IN THE JANA SANGH AND CPM), BUT ALSO IT WOULD AMOUNT TO A TACIT ADMISSION BY THE JANATA THAT HER PERSONAL POWER BASE AND POPULAR APPEAL IS NOW SO STRONG THAT IT FEARS THE CONSEQUENCES OF PROSECUTING HER. THUS, IT IS STILL NOT CLEAR HOW THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROCEED ON THE FINDINGS OF THE SHAH COMMISSION REPORTS.

10. AS FOR THE OPPOSITION, CONFUSION PREVAILS IN THE OFFICIAL CONGRESS AS TO WHERE IT GOES NEXT. AS WE REPORTED IN NEW DELHI A-129,, THE PARTY'S "NATIONAL POLITICAL CONFERENCE" FAR FROM RESOLVED THE QUESTION OF UNITY OF THE TWO CONGRESS PARTIES. THE MAHARASHTRA CONTINGENT SEEMS DETERMINED TO COME TO SOME FORM OF ACCOMMODATION WITH MRS. GANDHI TO PRESERVE ITS COALITION WITH THE CONGRESS (I) IN THAT STATE. OTHER PRO-UNITY FIGURES CONTINUE TO FLOAT THE IDEA IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, BUT ARE MEETING STRONG RESISTANCE FROM THE HARD-CORE ANTI-INDIRA GROUP CLUSTERED AROUND FORMER MINISTERS (IN INDIRA'S CABINET) Y.B. CHAVAN AND DR. KARAN SINGH. CHAVAN KEEPS URGING CONGRESSMEN THAT THEY MUST FACE A PROLONGED PERIOD IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS IN ORDER TO REBUILD THE PARTY'S FORTUNES, BUT IT IS EVIDENT THAT MANY OF HIS COLLEAGUES ARE UNWILLING TO RISK SUCH HIBERNATION WHILE WAITING FOR "SOMETHING" TO HAPPEN

AND WILL EVENTUALLY MAKE THEIR OWN ADJUSTMENTS

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TO WHAT THEYY BELIEVE ARE THE POLITICAL REALITIES.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SUMMARIES, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978NEWDE08656
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780232-0568
Format: TEL
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197806102/aaaadkcp.tel
Line Count: 392
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4e20777c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 8
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 NEW DELHI 8047, 78 NEW DELHI A-129
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2144835
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIAN POLITICS: A PRE-VISIT UPDATE
TAGS: PINT, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4e20777c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014